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ABSTRACT

A naturalistic study of two bilingual first grade classrooms was conducted to gain an increased understanding of the cultural literacy instruction beliefs in society and to better understand the process by which literacy instruction beliefs influence the classroom. One Anglo and one Hispanic teacher working in different midwestern school systems were observed for four months. Both were considered competent bilingual educators, but each exemplified a different approach to teaching literacy. The Hispanic teacher was a strong proponent of the sight word approach and the basal reader from which she taught also emphasized this approach. The Anglo teacher taught reading from a phonics basal and personally advocated this approach. Strong cultural beliefs about how literacy most effectively develops guided the curriculum and instruction. The very strategies that both teachers attempted in order to simplify English literacy instruction frequently made the process more difficult for Spanish speaking children, who did not have the knowledge Anglo children learn at home. The results gave support for a literacy program based on psycholinguistic principles, stressing the immediate use of whole texts by children rather than emphasizing skills and smaller bits of language. (HTH)

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A Naturalistic Study of Literacy in Bilingual Classrooms

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Abstract

Beginning English literacy programs for limited-English-speaking children traditionally emphasize the acquisition of metalinguistic and elementary phonics skills prior to the reading and writing of complete texts. For children who have not learned these kinds of skills at home, literacy becomes an arduous process. As the children fail the traditional instructional approaches, the language and cultural deficit hypotheses emerge. A whole language, psycholinguistic approach to literacy enables these LES children to both successfully demonstrate their literacy knowledge and to further their understanding of the forms and functions of literacy.

Introduction

Culture consists of complex and intricate webs of significance, networks of meaning potential which have developed through repeated transactions of members of a culture with their environment. The totality of these webs of significance represents a worldview, a conceptualization of what the world is about (Geertz, 1973). As members of a culture are born and raised within the culture, they learn the established worldview by transacting with others from the culture (Halliday, 1975, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978). A worldview is acquired so gradually that members do not even realize the arbitrary nature of their own reality.

Beliefs about literacy from one component of cultural webs of significance. There are cultural beliefs about which language should be the language of literacy instruction (Fishman, 1982; Goodman, Goodman and Flores, 1979), about how literacy is most effectively learned (Chall, 1967; Harste and Burke, 1978; Smith, 1965), about which functions and styles of literacy should be emphasized in formal literacy instruction (Goodman, Goodman and Flores, 1979; Heath, 1983; Pattison, 1982; Philips, 1975; Scollon and Scollon, 1981; Scribner and Cole, 1981), about how parents should best prepare their children for formal literacy instruction (Heath, 1983; Scollon and Scollon, 1981; Snow, 1983), and about why certain classes of children fail to achieve literacy under the normal conditions established by the culture and school (Edelsky, et al., 1984; Flores, 1982; Hymes, 1980; Labov, 1972a, 1972b; McDermott, 1976; Rist, 1970; Scollon and Scollon, 1981). These beliefs guide the behavior of people as they teach, observe, evaluate, discuss and interpret literacy instruction.

The formal English literacy instruction environment and the beliefs upon which this environment is based are frequently being suggested as possible

reasons underlying the English literacy failure of LES children. Goodman and Goodman (1978) argue that teachers do not utilize the first language knowledge of bilingual children in the second language literacy instruction process. As a result, minority children are unable to build upon the linguistic resources which they already have. Edelsky, et al. (1983) and Flores (1982) suggest that teachers view the first language which bilingual children possess in a negative light. The first language knowledge of minority children is frequently considered deficient and the cause of interference problems in the second language learning process. Heath (1983), Philips (1975) and Scollon and Scollon (1981) argue that different cultural groups value and utilize different kinds of literacy. Children learn those literacies valued in their homes and within their cultural groups. Unfortunately, the school may accept only limited kinds of literacy knowledge as appropriate. Minority, limited-English-speaking children may be excluded from participating in successful school experiences because formal literacy instruction is not being based on experiences which they bring from their home.

Methodology

In order to gain an increased understanding of the cultural literacy instruction beliefs in our society and in order to better understand the process by which literacy instruction beliefs influence the negotiation of literacy in the classroom, a naturalistic study of two bilingual first-grade classrooms was undertaken. In particular, this research explored the effects of beliefs about how literacy should best be taught (i.e. methods, materials, sequence in skills, approaches) on the literacy development process of Hispanic, limited-English-speaking children. This study also explored the effects of school literacy policies (i.e. selection of basal programs, length

of native literacy instruction programs, suggested adaptations of the English literacy programs for Hispanic students) on both classroom literacy instruction and Hispanic literacy development.

Two first-grade bilingual teachers, one Hispanic and one Anglo, working in different school systems in a midwestern, urban area were observed during the entire school day for a four month period of time. The formal and informal literacy instruction of each teacher was recorded via fieldnotes and audio or videotapes. In addition, ethnographic interviews were conducted with each teacher approximately twelve times and samples of teacher lesson plans, hand-outs, audio-visual materials and boardwork exercises were also collected and/or recorded. The principals, the bilingual directors, additional teachers and the students in each classroom were also interviewed. Samples of school-generated curriculum guides, bilingual instruction schedules, memos from bilingual instruction meetings, and state and school guidelines for bilingual education were also gathered.

Both teachers were considered competent bilingual educators and both school systems had bilingual programs which were respected within the state in which they operated. Each of the bilingual teachers in the study taught in an integrated, self-contained classroom with an initial Spanish literacy program. In addition, each program was transitional in nature; students received instruction in Spanish only until a transition to English could be made.

Each teacher, however, did exemplify a different approach to the teaching of literacy. Mrs. Martinez, who taught at Culver Elementary, was a strong proponent of the sight-word approach and the basal from which she taught also emphasized this approach. Miss Wagner, a bilingual teacher at Lincoln Elementary, taught reading from a phonics basal and she also

personally advocated this approach. The sight-word and phonics approaches to literacy instruction represent two very prevalent approaches presently being used in our schools (Chall, 1967; Harste and Burke, 1978; Smith, 1965). By studying the literacy instruction of teachers with diverse theoretical approaches, working in similar kinds of bilingual programs, the effect of different literacy instruction beliefs on classroom literacy environments could be determined. By studying differences in literacy policies, across school systems, useful information about social and cultural influences on classroom literacy environments could be ascertained.

A detailed description of the literacy environment being negotiated in each classroom was constructed. Data derived from the interviews, fieldnotes and taped literacy lessons were transcribed, coded and analyzed over the course of the research project. Examples from boardwork exercises and hand-outs were also integrated into the profile being constructed for each classroom. Questions, contrasts and hypotheses which emerged during the research were systematically checked out in subsequent interviews and observations. In this way, a detailed description of each classroom's literacy environment gradually evolved.

The research in each classroom indicated that many of the Hispanic children were having tremendous difficulties learning to read when instruction was based on a phonics or sight-word approach. The lowest reading groups in both classrooms consisted almost entirely of Hispanic children. In addition, both Mrs. Martinez and Miss Wagner stated that their literacy programs had not been successful for many of the bilingual children. With these facts in mind, the author, after leaving the research setting, developed alternative literacy strategies and lessons for limited-English-speaking children. For a period of two months, the author taught

English literacy in a summer school program to kindergarten and first-grade, Hispanic, LES students who had failed their school literacy programs the previous year. The lessons and strategies developed by the author were psycholinguistic in nature, and designed to present literacy instruction alternatives which would result in literacy success rather than failure for the Hispanic child. The lessons and strategies were taped, transcribed, coded and analyzed. In addition, samples of the children's English reading and writing were also collected. A teacher journal of day-to-day reflections about the successes and failures of the literacy activities was also kept.

Results

In both schools, despite the native literacy component, English literacy instruction was overwhelmingly emphasized and valued. In general, the classroom aides, rather than Mrs. Martinez or Miss Wagner, taught the Spanish literacy lessons. Neither teacher spent as much time planning, preparing materials nor evaluating student achievement in Spanish literacy as she did in English literacy. Both schools, in their daily and weekly policy statements and formal curriculum endeavors, emphasized almost exclusively those goals related to English literacy instruction.

In addition, at both Lincoln and Culver, the Hispanic children learned to read English by using the English basal and language arts series designed for the monolingual English speakers. Rather than question the appropriateness of the entire literacy approach, "adaptations" of the program were made in order to facilitate the English literacy development process for the Hispanic children. For example, at Lincoln, teachers were encouraged to develop the English oral language of the children prior to each reading lesson, to use a language experience approach with beginning Hispanic readers, to explain English vocabulary items in Spanish, and to adjust biased

test items. At Culver, although few formal curriculum suggestions for the English literacy program were made, a concurrent approach was encouraged. In a concurrent approach, the bilingual instructor essentially teaches the standard curriculum designed for the monolingual English speakers, but translates each lesson into Spanish immediately after presenting it in English. At both schools, therefore, English literacy activities involved the Hispanic children learning to read and write from the English monolingual curriculum.

The English monolingual literacy curriculum in both schools emphasized a preset and very specific sequence of skills. In particular, in both Miss Wagner's and Mrs. Martinez's classrooms, the Hispanic LES children were expected to master specific metalinguistic and elementary phonic skills before the reading and writing of whole texts began. Children had to understand the difference between the concepts of sound, letter, and word, and be able to verbalize that difference in response to teacher questions, before extensive reading and writing of stories and other texts took place. In addition, it was expected that students would be able to state phonics rules and apply those rules to specific words in drill exercises.

In both classrooms, many of the Hispanic, LES children had difficulty progressing through these metalinguistic skills. It was mainly for this reason that the lowest reading groups consisted almost entirely of Hispanic students. The emphasis on metalinguistic and phonics skills in formal literacy instruction made literacy an arduous process for the Hispanic children. As the children failed the established literacy program, the language deficiency hypothesis resulted. Rather than place blame on literacy methods, materials or assumptions, teachers blamed the Hispanic child's language and cultural background.

Transcript data from Miss Wagner's classroom illustrate the difficulty which the Hispanic children in the lowest reading group had with one of the initial literacy skills, the different sounds which the letter "c" can have. The children must be able to distinguish between the concepts of sound, letter, and word. The children must also be able to verbalize this rule of phonics and apply it to unknown words. In the first half of the transcript, Miss Wagner practices the rule with the class. In the second half, the particular difficulties which one student had are revealed.

T: Look up here, please. Put your books down and look up here. Oh, oh! Here are these two clowns again. What do these two clowns teach us about? Tomas, do you remember? (1)
S1: the words (2)
S2: I know (3)
T: There's one letter two clowns are here to teach us about. Juanita. (4)
J: s, c, k (names the letters) (5)
S2: c (6)
T: O.K. But which letter do the clowns, which is the letter which can make all those sounds? (7)
S: c (8)
T: The c. And what two sounds can the c make? (9)
S2: hmmm? (10)
T: This clown thinks it can make the (pause)? (11)
Ss: s (12)
T: S sound. And this clown thinks it can make the (pause) (13)
Ss: k (14)
T: K sound. Is that right? Are they both right? (15)
Ss: yeah (16)
T: Yes. It can make both those sounds. What, Miguel, three letters, which three letters can come after the c to make it sound like an s? These three balloons. Look at these balloons.
S: y, e, and i (18)
T: e, i and y. If an e, i, or y come after the c, how will the c sound? Like an [s] (makes the sound). But this clown says if an a, o, or u or a lot of other letters come after the c, it will sound how? (19)
Ss: k (20)
T: [k], [k] (makes the sound). O.K. Say [s] or [k] (makes the sounds for both the letters) when I point. Ready? (21)
Ss: (The teacher points to each side of the poster, to the sounds represented under each clown and the students make the sound [s] or [k].) (22)

T: O.K. Let's say that we took this word. What letter comes after the c? (23)
S: i (24)
T: An i. Is it going to sound like an s or is it going to sound like a [k], [k]? (25)
S: s (26)
T: Why? (27)
S: 'Cause it's an i in it? (28)
T: Because it has an i after it and this counts. If an i comes after a c, it will sound? (29)
S2: I know what the word is? (30)
S2: pencil (31)
T: Is it right, Miguel? Pencil? O.K. So which side does it go on, Miguel? (32)
S: That one. (33)
T: Miguel, what comes after this? (34)
M: e (35)
T: E. Will it sound like an s or like a k? (36)
M: (no response) (37)
T: Miguel? (38)
M: huh? (39)
T: Look at the clowns. They will tell you. If an e, i, or y come after the c, then it will sound like an s. If an a or a u come after it, then it will sound like a k. Which one? (pause) Well, what letter comes after the c? (40)
M: e (41)
T: e. Is the e on this side or on this side? (42)
M: (points to the correct side) (43)
T: This side. O.K. How does this clown say this s will sound then? It says the c will sound, what is this letter? (44)
M: s (45)
T: An s. O.K. (46)

In order to teach the "hard c" and "soft c" sounds, Miss Wagner had devised a poster with two clowns, each holding balloons which contained the vowels to clue an "s" or "k" sound. In line 9, Miss Wagner asks for the sounds which the letter "c" can make. When the children are unable to answer, she points to each clown in order to clue the children to the possible sounds (lines 11, 13). In line 17, she asks them for the vowels which indicate the "s" or "k" sound. Again, because a response is not immediately given, Miss Wagner points to the balloons so that the students have a clue (line 17). As the transcript demonstrates, the Hispanic children in Miss Wagner's classroom were having problems learning these metalinguistic

skills.

Miss Wagner develops a definite sequence of phonics analysis which the children must follow in order to effectively decode a designated word. The children must first find the letter "c", determine which vowel comes after it, make the appropriate sound, and finally say the word (lines 23, 25, 29). One student (line 30) knows what the designated word is even before the sequence is finished. Nevertheless, Miss Wagner insists that the appropriate sequence be followed before any child is allowed to read the word.

At the end of the transcript, Miss Wagner asks a specific student, Miguel, to apply the rule to a word. In lines 34 through 46, Miss Wagner leads Miguel through the analysis. She tells him to find the vowel after the letter "c" (line 34), asks him which sound it will make (line 36), asks him to look at the clowns (line 49), reexplains the rule (line 40), asks on which side of the poster is the vowel "e" located (line 42), and points out the letter which stands for the sound the "c" will make in this specific word (line 46). In line 47, Miguel does finally say the correct letter, but one is doubtful if he understood anything at all about this literacy lesson.

Miss Wagner is a phonics advocate and therefore she believes that reading is a letter-by-letter, word-by-word process. Interviews with Miss Wagner confirmed her belief that effective readers were effective precisely because they were able to attribute a sound to each letter, put the sounds together to form a word, and then put words together to form a sentence. Knowledge of phonics rules helps children attribute sounds to letters, a very important initial step in the literacy development process. Because of this belief, Mis Wagner spent four times as much time with the all-Hispanic lowest reading group, trying to help them learn how to verbalize rules of phonics, distinguish and explain so-called basic literacy concepts, and manipulate

words, letters and sounds. In addition, as the previous transcript revealed, Miss Wagner had these low readers verbalize and apply phonics knowledge as they read stores orally and as they did workbook pages.

Because of her perceptions of how reading skills most effectively should be sequenced, Miss Wagner devised different kinds of activities and strategies for the top and low reading groups. The top reading group, almost exclusively Anglo, could adequately perform these metalinguistic skills. As a result, they read more stories, answered more interpretive rather than literal questions, only briefly reviewed phonics rules, did more creative writing assignments and worked more independently than did the students in the lower groups. The students in the lower groups, all Hispanic, were unable to perform these metalinguistic skills well. As a result, they read fewer stories, reread the same stories, answered mainly literal questions, spent much more time on explicit phonics instruction, and only wrote carefully controlled fill-in-the-blank types of exercises.

Miss Wagner stated that poor readers frequently came from homes deficient in language experiences, and, as a result, they did not have a strong linguistic base upon which to develop literacy skills. By emphasizing phonics skills and drills in her classroom, she was trying to provide her students with an appropriate base upon which to build. Until they had a solid base, all their literacy activities had to be carefully controlled and sequenced so they would not make mistakes and find reading and writing difficult processes. On the other hand, it was believed that Anglos came from homes which valued and practiced literacy. The evidence for this was the fact that Anglos could perform the metalinguistic skills. As a result, Anglo children progressed quickly to the reading and writing of complete texts.

Miss Martinez, a sight-word advocate, devised slightly different kinds of adaptations to the literacy program. Although Mrs. Martinez also believed that reading was an exact, word-by-word process and that beginning literacy instruction should emphasize the development of metalinguistic and phonics skills, Mrs. Martinez also believed that effective readers had to learn to immediately recognize a multitude of words by sight. Although phonics knowledge helped readers learn words and learn about words, memorization of words was also an important strategy. All the students in Mrs. Martinez's class, Anglo and Hispanic, had to practice and memorize words in workbook exercises, boardwork activities and chart sentences before actually reading the words in stories. After practicing the words so extensively, Mrs. Martinez expected her students to recognize the new words immediately when they read them in stories. Mrs. Martinez rarely had students read any sentences or stories which contained unknown words because she believed that reading would become frustrating to students if they did not immediately recognize all words. The Anglo and Hispanic students in Mrs. Martinez's class never wrote creatively. She believed that copying was an important strategy to help students learn words, but that creative writing was too complex a task for beginning literacy users.

In a sight-word approach to literacy, students gradually acquire a repertoire of words. Because beginning readers know few words, their exercises are carefully controlled so that they contain only known words. Two examples of boardwork exercises recorded during the initial stages of the English literacy program in Mrs. Martinez's classroom are found below (Examples I and II). Because the Hispanic children were just beginning to learn to read in English, it was assumed that the only words they could read

were the words which had been taught in class. For this reason, the exercises contain words which had been formally taught to the children.

EXAMPLE I

1. Boys can ride up and down.
2. The boys ride up and down.
3. The man walks in and out.
4. The man runs and jumps out.
5. The girl jumps up and down.
6. A girl can ride in and out.
7. The man, boy and girl jump in and out.

EXAMPLE II

1. The boys and girls can _____.
   red run
2. A big man jumps_____ in the house.
   down ride
3. A _____ runs to Washington School.
   boy down
4. I _____ to the bus.
   walk can
5. The _____ can run, jump, hide.
   girls up

The limited-English-speaking students had learned to read the following English words: boy, boys, girl, girls, ride, jump, walk, run, up, down, out and can. Because these were the only words learned formally these were also almost the only words which the children read or wrote in their exercises. In Example I, the students had to copy the sentences. In Example II, the students had to underline one of two possible words which made the sentence make sense. These boardwork activities demonstrate Mrs. Martinez's belief in the exact nature of the reading and writing processes. She believes that children should not make any mistakes when reading or writing. For this reason, the students only read and copied previously taught words. There was no belief in the constructive or transactional nature of literacy development.

There were also some differences in instruction between the top Anglo and the low Hispanic reading groups in Mrs. Martinez's classroom. Because of her belief in the importance of sight word recognition, Mrs. Martinez believed that effective readers recognized large numbers of words and had a developed metalinguistic awareness of what words were. Good readers had learned these skills in their homes. Poor readers, on the other hand, had limited vocabulary, incorrect knowledge of the meaning of different words, and had poor metalinguistic skills. Again, there was a belief that the language of poor readers had not been adequately developed in their homes. For these reasons, Mrs. Martinez spent extra time helping the low Hispanic readers talk about words, name words, name letters with which words began, and name sounds for words. In addition, Mrs. Martinez spent part of each day's reading lesson teaching the Hispanic children the vocabulary which would appear in the lesson.

Mrs. Martinez also carefully structured and sequenced other related literacy activities for the Hispanic children. For example, she simplified the comprehension questions suggested in the basal by changing them to a yes/no format. She also provided numerous clues in order to help the children respond correctly. Because of the time required to do these special adaptations, by the end of the year the Hispanic children had read relatively few stories and had completed few of the first grade basal activities. When asked why these Hispanic children had difficulty with these beginning literacy activities, Mrs. Martinez stated that they came to school underprepared and needed a great deal of oral and written language development. Thus, the child's cultural and language background was blamed for the literacy failure.

Implications

Miss Wagner and Mrs. Martinez taught literacy according to methods (i.e. phonics or sight-word) advocated by the society. Strong cultural beliefs about how literacy most effectively develops guide curriculum and instructional endeavors in the schools. There is a basic belief that children must know how to talk about sounds, letters and words before reading and writing complete texts. White, middle-class children learn these kinds of skills in their homes. Snow (1983) documents a middle-class mother performing the same kinds of initial literacy activities with her 32 month-old child that Miss Wagner did with her LES students. When the young child, however, comes to school, because of his extensive prior experience with metalinguistic tasks, he will easily complete the traditional beginning literacy program.

The very strategies which Mrs. Martinez and Miss Wagner attempted in order to simplify English literacy instruction frequently made the English literacy process more difficult for children who did not possess the requisite knowledge. Many of the simplification strategies (i.e. asking only literal questions or reformulating questions), the tight structuring and control of syntax and vocabulary (i.e. emphasis on fill-in-the-blank exercises, reading and writing of sentences which contain only known words), the repetition and review of isolated bits of literacy texts (i.e. drill on phonics skills, repeated review of individual words) and the emphasis on metalinguistic skills (i.e. naming letters and sounds of words, verbalizing phonics rules) prevented many of the Hispanic children from fully utilizing all their conceptual and linguistic resources. Socio-psycholinguistic literacy theory (Goodman and Goodman, 1978; Harste, Burke and Woodward, 1981) postulates that all children, including limited-English-speaking children,

bring a tremendous amount of conceptual and linguistic knowledge to the reading and writing processes in English. Rather than exclusively emphasizing either grapho-phonemic knowledge or lexical knowledge, teachers need to provide literacy activities which maintain the integrity of all the linguistic cueing systems. In reading and writing, language users, including LES students, rely on syntax, semantics, grapho-phonemics, pragmatics, and their world knowledge in order to construct a meaningful interpretation of a text (Goodman and Goodman, 1978; Harste, Burke and Woodward, 1981). Literacy activities need to allow Hispanic children to use their linguistic and conceptual resources to construct meaning of a text. Literacy activities also need to allow Hispanic children to further their conceptualization about literacy as a process, to gradually come to know the social conventions of English literacy, and to learn English.

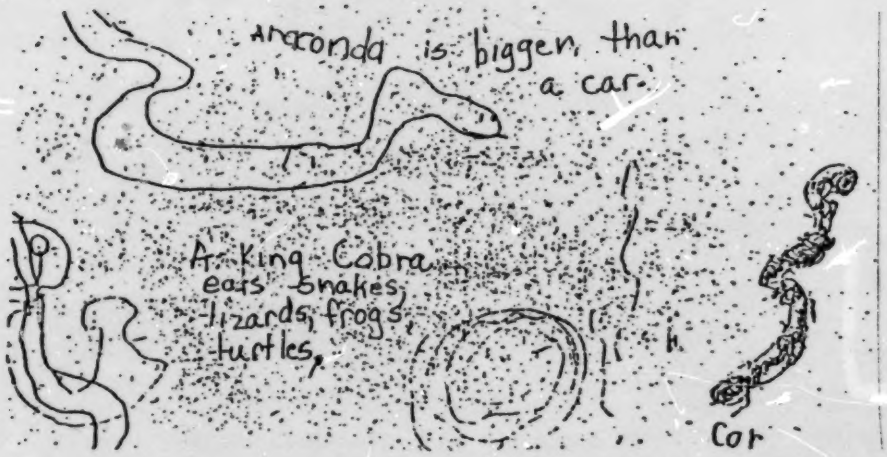
In a literacy program based on psycholinguistic principles, children read and are read, write and have written whole texts. All literacy activities are designed to allow children to utilize and develop their linguistic and conceptual resources. Rather than begin literacy instruction by teaching metalinguistic skills, by emphasizing small units of language, and by structuring and controlling words and grammar so that children will not make mistakes, teachers in a psycholinguistic classroom stress the immediate utilization of whole texts by children. Initially, children are either read stories with predictable syntax and meaning or children dictate to a teacher their own stories using their own language. As children transact with a variety of texts, they learn English, learn about the process of literacy and learn about the conventions of literacy. The purpose of all reading and writing activities is to allow children to hypothesis-test about language, literacy and the world, and, in so doing, to refine their

conceptual and linguistic knowledge. If literacy errors are monitored over time, as children transact with a variety of texts, development in language and literacy will be observed.

In the psycholinguistically-oriented classroom of the author, Hispanic children did demonstrate the literacy knowledge which they possessed, despite the fact that most of the children had failed their first year of schooling. Case studies of various children also revealed that by reading and writing whole texts literacy and language proficiency developed. The data on one particular student illustrate this point. Serafin was a Hispanic child, designated as a non-reader, who had failed a first grade phonics program and who was being placed in a special education program the following year. Although Serafin had been labeled a non-reader, he was, in fact, able to produce a series of texts which revealed knowledge of the grapho-phonemic, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic systems in English. Serafin was able to demonstrate his knowledge for the first time because confusing classroom constraints were lifted. Instead of continually focusing on controlled and limited pieces of text, Serafin was able to read and write whole texts. As a result, he was better able to utilize all his linguistic and conceptual resources in his literacy activities.

Three of the many writing samples collected from Serafin serve to illustrate his literacy knowledge. The first-grade class was planning a field trip to the zoo, and several literacy activities revolved around this class excursion. Initially, students dictated language experience stories about characteristics of different kinds of animals. After Serafin had perused the pages and pictures of several books dealing with reptiles, he drew about and then dictated a text, a portion of which appears below (see Example III).

EXAMPLE III



Serafin himself wrote the word "anaconda", and drew the pictures of various kinds of snakes, turtles, lizards and alligators. Because of the pictures in the books, he also understood what the different reptiles ate, their size and several distinguishing characteristics. Serafin was vitally interested in one drawing which depicted an anaconda as larger than a car. A bilingual conversation between the author and Serafin helped Serafin formulate his ideas into English.

For several days, Serafin learned about different animals from the books and magazines set up at learning centers arranged around the room. Within two days, however, Serafin had moved from dictating a text to writing his own. He first labeled a picture with an animal's name, then wrote a sentence describing what an animal was doing, and finally produced a text which explained several characteristics of an animal. Metalinguistic and phonics skills were not part of the formal classroom literacy instruction. Rather, Serafin was provided with books, paper, pencil and a purpose for finding out something about the world.

During this process of exploration, Serafin asked to have a book, About Owls (Garelick, 1975), read to him. Example IV is the second of two texts which Serafin produced in response to the reading of this book.

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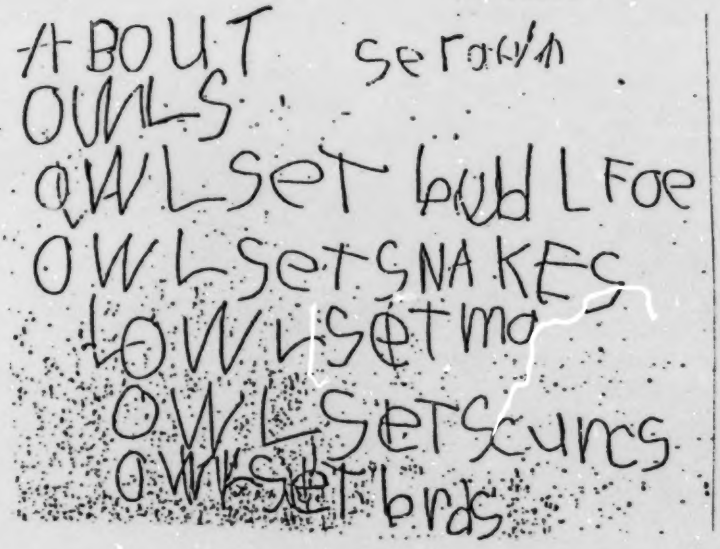
EXAMPLE IV



About
owls
Owls eat butterflies
Owls eat snakes
Owls eat man
Owls eat skunks
Owls eat birds

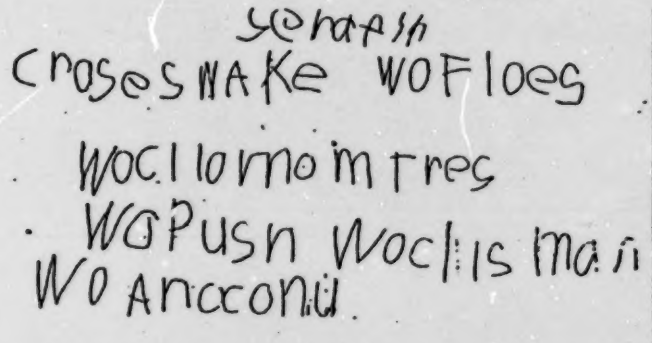
Although this text is about owls, Serafin incorporates vocabulary and ideas which he had learned in the earlier language experience story. As he had previously explained what snakes eat, he now explains for owls. His previous strategy of looking at pictures to construct meaning is now carried over into this new text construction experience. In addition, he utilizes another author's text to help him communicate a personal meaning. The title and the spelling of the word "owls" are borrowed into Serafin's new text.

Serafin's text about owls demonstrates a developing control of the English linguistic cueing systems. Pragmatically, Serafin writes an expanded expository text, including details to support his topic of owls. The wording of his title clues the reader effectively to the content of his text. Syntactically, he conveys his knowledge by repeating an appropriate grammatical pattern. Semantically, Serafin's text makes sense. All of his statements serve to explain what different kinds of owls eat. Finally, Serafin also demonstrates grapho-phonemic knowledge. He is able to construct an appropriate and meaningful text even though he may not be able to perform beginning metalinguistic and phonics activities. Serafin can apply language

and literacy rules although he may not be able to explain them in a traditional lesson.

The last writing example was produced to explain an imaginary animal constructed for a classroom zoo. Students listened to Dr. Suess's On Beyond Zebra (1955) and then created their own imaginary animal (Huck, 1961). Serafin made a six foot snake with feathers and then described his creation in the following text (see Example V).

EXAMPLE V



Crazy snake who flies
Who climbs on trees
Who poisons who kills man
Who's an anaconda

This text demonstrates Serafin's continual expansion and transformation of linguistic and conceptual knowledge. In this text, he combines his knowledge of a real anaconda (i.e. one who climbs on trees and kills man) with imagined knowledge (i.e. one who flies and is crazy). Serafin begins to vary his syntax with a new pattern. He also begins to incorporate new stylistic devices appropriate to this new literacy context. He starts his text with an interesting phrase (i.e. crazy snake), maintains suspense throughout his text, and finally ends with a name given to the animal which he is describing. In fact, Serafin's text has a poetic quality to it. Through unrestricted reading and writing, Serafin learns about language and literacy, about conventions and about the world. He learns words (i.e. anaconda), syntactic patterns (i.e. who is....), stylistic devices (i.e. crazy snake), and, most importantly, he learns how to use literacy to understand the world and communicate to others.

These literacy examples demonstrate that Serafin possessed literacy knowledge, but because of confusing classroom constraints, he was unable to demonstrate what he knew. Classrooms which focus on isolated literacy skills, especially in the initial stages of a literacy program, place many children at a disadvantage academically. Hispanic, bilingual children have definitely had some literacy experiences, either in English or Spanish, prior to coming to school. The knowledge which they have can be expressed in various ways. Teachers must determine those forms and functions of literacy with which they are most familiar and base their literacy instruction on them. Teachers must also assume that Hispanic children utilize information from all the linguistic cueing systems to construct a meaningful interpretation of a text passage. They should, therefore, orchestrate a literacy program which emphasizes this complete knowledge, and not demand that the children principally utilize the grapho-phonemic system to construct meaning. Teachers must also realize that metalinguistic knowledge is culturally-based and is not necessarily tied to reading proficiency. By insisting that Hispanic children possess this kind of knowledge before they are allowed to read, teachers are discouraging them from furthering their literacy knowledge and they are ignoring the knowledge which they already possess. Finally, for those children who need to develop their conceptualization about literacy as a symbolic process, teachers need to provide alternative literacy experiences. Children need to read and be read, write and have written complete texts, rather than being drilled on isolated aspects of the literacy system. It is only as they read and write whole texts that children's conceptualization and understanding about literacy can grow.

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